

The Southern Frontier

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The White Primary vs. Democracy

The "20% Democracy" discussed in the October issue of Southern Frontier is labeled "For White Only." Can we call it Democracy at all when so many citizens are denied true suffrage?

By Stetson Kennedy

FOR APPROXIMATELY half a century the political administration of white supremacy in the South has rested upon the institution of the Democratic primary. After the overthrow of Reconstruction in 1876, white supremacy was established and maintained for about a quarter of a century by means of Democratic nominating conventions, from which Negroes could readily be excluded. During that painful period the plain white people of the South were so terrorized by the alleged danger of "Black Rule" that they submitted to the machinations inherent in such conventions. But the severe depression of 1891-92 aroused them to real dangers—and Populism was born.

As the Populist-wrought political unity between Southern whites and Negroes, workers and farmers, developed into a serious threat to plutocracy, the plutocrats bought off the whites with the lily-white Democratic primary, in return for which the whites acceded to imposition of the poll tax. Without the guarantee that the poll tax would reduce the electorate to a controllable minority, the ruling class would never have entrusted its political power to the primaries.

Corruption Brings Regulation

Even so—the primaries were rampant with fraud and corruption until popular demand eventually forced the adoption of regulatory laws by the states. Most states provided that in order to vote in a primary, one must first be qualified to vote in the general election, and also meet whatever qualifications might be imposed by the party. Some states adopted laws limiting the Democratic primary to whites, while others—one eye on the 15th Amendment—delegated to the parties the power to make such limitations.

Since then, the Democratic primary has served its undemocratic purpose notoriously well. As the 1944 Presidential election approached, the white primary remained inviolate in the eight deep Southern states of Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas. And yet in North Carolina, Virginia, Kentucky, West Virginia, Missouri, and parts of Tennessee, the bars had been lowered and Negroes

were free to vote in the Democratic primary if they would.

Throughout the intervening years, a few heroic Negroes had dared to challenge the Constitutionality of the white primary. And though the long road to justice has often seemed hopelessly blocked, the end is at last in sight. It began to unwind in 1927, when the U. S. Supreme Court in *Nixon v. Herndon* declared unconstitutional a Texas statute limiting the Democratic primary to whites. Thereupon the Texas legislature proceeded to delegate the discriminatory power to the executive committee of the State Democratic Party; but in 1932 this arrangement was likewise declared unconstitutional in *Nixon v. Condon*.

Tactics of Evasion

Not to be outdone, the Democratic Party of Texas next exercised its racial discrimination by means of a resolution passed at its state convention, rather than by its executive committee. And this time the Supreme Court, in *Grovey v. Townsend* in 1935, held that the Democratic convention in Texas had not acted as an organ of the State, and that its denial of a vote in its primary was a mere refusal of party membership with which "the state need have no concern."

Thus the subterfuge of the white primary was given an air of legality it had not enjoyed before, and white supremacists sighed with relief. Their relief was short-lived, however, for in 1941 the revitalized Supreme Court handed down a decision which caused Justice Reed to declare, "*Grovey v. Townsend* is over-ruled." This was the historic "Classic case" which came up from Louisiana and involved the

"Let every man exercise his just and equal right to vote."

— Thomas Jefferson

"The right to vote must be open to all our citizens irrespective of race, color, or creed—without tax or artificial restriction of any kind. The sooner we get to that basis of political equality, the better it will be for the country as a whole."

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

applicability of Constitutional guarantees to primaries which are regulated by the state. The Court ruled that such a primary "involves a necessary step in the choice of candidates" for national office "which in the circumstances of this case controls that choice"; and that the choice must therefore be made in a manner that does not offend the Constitution.

The Death Knell

This decision was a long step toward democracy, but it remained for the epochal "Texas case," *Smith v. Allwright*, to sound the death knell of the white primary on April 3, 1944.* In this case a Texas Negro dentist, Dr. Lonnie E. Smith, had sued an election official who had refused to let him vote in the Democratic primary in 1940. The Court's 8-1 decision, written by Justice Stanley Reed of Kentucky, took cognizance of the fact that Texas primaries were conducted "under statutory authority" and that this makes the party "an agency of the state insofar as it determines the participants in a primary election." Said the Court:

"It may now be taken as a postulate that the right to vote in such a primary for the nomination of candidates without discrimination by the state, like the right to vote in a general election, is a right secured by the Constitution. By the terms of the 15th Amendment that right may not be abridged by the state on account of race. Under our Constitution the great privilege of the ballot may not be denied a man by the state because of his color. The United States is a constitutional democracy. Its organic law grants to all citizens a right to participate in the choice of elected officials without restriction by any state because of race."

"This grant to the people of opportunity for choice is not to be nullified by a state through casting its electoral process in a form which permits a private organization to practice racial discrimination in the election. Constitutional rights would be of little value if they could thus be indirectly denied."

Protests—and Threats

The reaction of political spokesmen for the white primary states was only to be expected.

"One of my greatest fears has been realized," confessed Representative John

*In recent decisions, the Florida Supreme Court and the Middle Georgia Federal District Court have ruled that the Negro is entitled to vote in Democratic primary elections.

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To attain through research and action programs the ideals and practices of equal opportunity for all peoples in the region.

EDITORIAL

Governor Millard Caldwell deserves commendation for the apparently determined stand he has taken to see that the lynching of a Negro man at Madison, Florida, last month be thoroughly investigated. He has asked Circuit Judge R. H. Rowe to empanel a new grand jury for the investigation and appoint a special officer to take the place of Sheriff Lonnie T. Davis, who is personally connected with the case.

Sheriff Davis, uncle of the five-year-old girl whom Jesse James Payne was accused of attempting to rape, left the county jail unguarded when Payne was brought to Madison for indictment. Governor Caldwell asked for a grand jury investigation to determine whether the sheriff is guilty of negligence. He asked for a new grand jury when it was learned that the sheriff's brother was a member of the present one.

The case began in July, when the little girl told of being fondled by a Negro man and an examination revealed that she had contracted a venereal disease. A posse shot and wounded Payne, who worked around the farm owned by the girl's father. State highway patrolmen guarded Payne from the posse and took him to the state prison at Raiford for safe-keeping. Last month he was brought back to Madison for arraignment and pleaded innocent. The same night he was taken from the unguarded jail and shot to death on the highway. The sheriff said that the jail was never guarded. The jail was apparently entered by some one who had a key. Other prisoners said they heard no unusual noises in the jail that night.

The present grand jury was the same one which indicted Payne. This, and the other circumstances, led Governor Caldwell to ask for a new grand jury and the appointment of a special officer. State Senator W. Turner Davis (who is not related to the sheriff) protested the action and said Sheriff Davis was "being done a gross injustice."

Most of the Florida newspapers, however, praised the Governor's action, and

Negro Leader Supports White Liberals

Dear Sir:

According to the press reports of the meeting of the National Council of Negro Democrats held in Columbia, South Carolina, on October 15, 1945, the vice-president of that organization, James E. Williams of New York, called upon the Negroes, "to fight for their constitutional rights regardless of certain white liberals," because, he continued, "they (the white liberals) won't go the whole way."

I wish to take strong exception to this statement. The liberal whites do not wish to be divorced from the Negro group; and can not be. And Negroes can not win their struggle for their "constitutional rights" without the support and cooperation of the white liberals. Moreover, I wish to go on record as opposing Negro nationalism as vigorously and as bitterly as I oppose "White Supremacy." Furthermore, I shall oppose all attempts to isolate the Negro people from the main progressive political movements in this country whether such attempts are made by Negro or white groups. That the Negro group has special problems we all agree. But these problems can and should be solved within a framework of sincere mutual Negro-white cooperation; in fact they can not be solved otherwise.

Every thinking Negro will concede that such organizations as the Southern Con-

ferred that the investigation be made effective.

"Let it be thorough with no political or personal favoritism," said the *Tampa Tribune*.

"Let's educate young America to Americanism and there won't be Constitution Halls and lynchings," said the *Miami Herald*.

"He was entitled to a trial he did not get," said the *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, "and he might have been an innocent man. . . . The *Independent* thinks Governor Caldwell should immediately suspend Davis and publicly reprimand him for gross negligence. . . ."

The Governor merits praise, provided the investigation is genuine from start to finish. Some of the newspaper comments carried a tone of wait-and-see, such as the *Jacksonville Journal's* closing line, which said:

"Let us hope that the same decisive and courageous spirit will carry the investigation through to a clear decision."

Editor Carl Hanton of the *Fort Myers News Press*, openly skeptical, said:

"The state is investigating the shooting of a Negro who was taken from an unguarded jail in Madison County. A report can be expected almost any day now finding that Madison County is in North Florida adjoining the Georgia line."

This was before Governor Caldwell ordered a new grand jury, which indicates the state intends to make the investigation thorough and effective.

ference for Human Welfare, the Southern Regional Council and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People are excellent examples of groups of liberal white people who are actively cooperating with the Negro group for the benefit of both. The CIO furnishes another outstanding example in which white and Negro laborers are cooperating to improve the working, living and political conditions of both groups. These are continuing efforts and certainly "go the whole way" in most cases. Another striking example, in our own South Carolina, is the revolutionary "Statement on the Race Problem in South Carolina," which was written and signed by twenty of the leading white liberals of the State. These liberals, by their progressive stand, braved the displeasure of the reactionary forces and laid themselves open to social and economic reprisals.

There is no doubt that A. Clayton Powell was elected to the Congress of the United States with the strong support of "liberal white people" who did not hesitate to "go the whole way" in his campaign. It is common knowledge that without the support of white people Powell could not have been nominated and elected.

It is also a well-known historical fact that it is only when the whites and Negroes have worked closely together in the South have the forces of reaction been effectively checked. World War II was fought and won on a basis of unity and cooperation. And we are now faced with the need for even greater unity, mutual understanding and cooperation to win the peace and the reconversion. Shall we then, at this critical period, accept a program which calls for a split, a division of the hard won cooperation gained during the war years? Shall the Negroes turn their backs to and discourage their white friends and fellow workers, friends and fellow workers who have gained a new understanding of the Negro people during the tragic period of combat and death, by saying to them that they are no longer desired as friends and supporters?

If the Negroes are not to manifest this base ingratitude and isolate themselves into an impasse, then how can they accept any program, any rash statement which runs counter to their best interests, counter to the ideals of America and counter to world trends toward creating a working democracy for all people? The answer is clear: The Negroes do not, can not and will not accept such a program!

Respectfully yours,

O. E. McKAINE

P. S. This letter is an expression of my personal opinion. However, I am the executive secretary of the Progressive Democratic Party, a member of the Adult Advisory Board of the Southern Negro Youth Congress, associate editor of the *Lighthouse and Informer* and a member of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare and the Southern Regional Council.

Spread of Tenancy Has Been Checked, Farm Security Official Predicts

THE 1945 census will show that the spread of tenancy has been checked, Regional Director E. S. Morgan of the Farm Security Administration predicted recently when he reported that one out of every fourteen "full owners" of farms in the four states of Region V attained ownership through the FSA.

Mr. Morgan, whose headquarters are at Montgomery, said there are now 18,413 new family type farm owners in the four states—Alabama, Georgia, Florida and South Carolina—and that all of these were former tenants or share-croppers. This is 7.43 per cent of the 247,741 full farm owners as reported by the 1940 census. Full owners are those who own and operate their farms as distinguished from part owners who own a part and rent another part of the land they operate.

Georgia Leads

Georgia led the four states with 9.69 per cent, nearly one of every ten full owners in the state, attaining ownership as a result of the FSA's rehabilitation and farm ownership programs. In Alabama it was one out of 14; South Carolina one out of 16, and Florida one out of 25.

Most of the 18,413 new farm owners in the region purchased their farms upon repayment terms of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act in the FSA's farm ownership program, Mr. Morgan said. There were 9,921 new owners who bought their farms with Bankhead-Jones funds, and another 1,683 family type farms were sold to tenants and sharecroppers in the liquidation of projects upon the Bankhead-Jones maximum 40 year repayment terms at three per cent.

The remaining 6,809 of the new owners are tenants and sharecroppers who have been enrolled in the FSA's rehabilitation program. After receiving training for the responsibilities of ownership in the rehabilitation program these borrowers purchased farms through the Federal Land Bank, insurance companies, banks and other sources.

Negro Farmers Gain

One of every seven Negro full owners of farms in Georgia, and one of every ten in the four states, are former tenants and share croppers who have attained ownership through the Farm Security Administration program, Mr. Morgan said.

The 1940 census shows there were 8,604 Negro full owners of farms in Georgia. The Farm Security Administration, since the beginning of the program on July 1, 1935, has aided 1,200 Negro borrowers in Georgia to attain the status of owners.

Mr. Morgan said a recent check of some of the new farm owners in Wilcox County, Georgia, disclosed that the families now spend from 400 to 500 per cent more in the normal channels of trade than was spent prior to their enrollment in the FSA rehabilitation program.

"I think we shall find that the spread of tenancy in these states has been checked when results of the 1945 census are announced," Mr. Morgan said. "These new farm owners have a stake in democracy which they could never have as tenants and sharecroppers. They now own a piece of the United States. They are not confronted with the prospect of moving from year to year. They have an interest in building and saving the land. Their civic interests and responsibilities have been broadened as a result of farm ownership. Their purchasing power has enormously increased and it is felt in virtually every town and community."

Two FSA Programs

Mr. Morgan explained that the Farm Security Administration operates only two programs—the rehabilitation program and the farm ownership program. The rehabilitation program is designed to prepare the borrower for the responsi-

bilities of ownership and is, in fact, an ownership training program. In this program loans are made to farm families who are unable to obtain credit from any other source. The family thereupon enters into an altogether different routine of farming from that observed by the average tenant and sharecropper. Under the guidance of the county FSA supervisor he follows a live-at-home program with ample canned foodstuffs to feed the family, and is given the opportunity of raising as much livestock and poultry as may be practical. (Most tenants and sharecroppers are not permitted to have much livestock.) He follows a diversified farming plan with two or more cash crops. In short, he learns a great deal about farming that he never had the opportunity to learn as a tenant and sharecropper. The family is provided with a record book and encouraged to keep a record of all expenditures and all income. A record book, of course, is something that few tenants and sharecroppers have ever seen.

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In the program as a whole, 18,413 former tenants and sharecroppers have become owners through participation in FSA's rehabilitation and farm ownership programs in the four Southeastern states.

State and Region	Full Owners (1940 Census)	New Owners (FSA)	Per Cent New Full Owners (FSA)	One Out of Every
ALABAMA	80,303	5,781	7.1	14
FLORIDA	40,692	1,817	4.46	25
GEORGIA	76,103	7,376	9.69	10
SOUTH CAROLINA	50,643	3,328	6.57	16
REGION V	247,741	18,302	7.3	14

Here is the breakdown of the total number of Negro full owners who have achieved ownership through the Farm Security Administration in the four Southeastern states, and its relation to the number of Negro full owners as given by the 1940 census:

State and Region	Negro Full Owners (1940 Census)	New Negro Owners (FSA)	Per Cent New Negro Full Owners	One Out of Every
ALABAMA	11,776	1,410	12.0	8
FLORIDA	4,508	259	5.7	17
GEORGIA	8,604	1,200	13.9	7
SOUTH CAROLINA	13,145	1,063	8.1	12
REGION V	38,033	3,932	10.3	10

Urban League Launches Fund

The National Urban League and the Urban League of Greater New York have joined forces for a nation-wide United Urban League Service Fund campaign to raise \$350,000 to expand the League's work throughout the nation. Elmo Roper is chairman and Henry Bruere is treasurer of the fund organization. Contributions are made to United Urban League Service Fund, 202 West 136th St., New York 30, N. Y.

Life in a Progressive Negro Community

The almost 30,000 population of the little city of Albany in South Georgia is 54 per cent Negro. "The Negro in Albany," by Dr. Aaron Brown, president of Albany State College, is the simple, human story of Negro community life in the city, told

in an attractive 70-page booklet, illustrated with many photographs.

Dr. Brown calls the booklet "a cross-section of . . . the Negro's part in making Albany an outstanding community." It shows the progress the Negro has made for himself in Albany, but does not gloss over the needs that still exist, such as improved education facilities.

Under the headline, "Negro Voters Double Here," the St. Petersburg, Fla., Times reported that city registration of Negro voters had "more than doubled." However, the total Negro registration was said to be 995, compared with 445 last year. The Times said 45 Negroes voted in the recent city election. Negro balloting in proportion to registration was about half that of white voters.

Florida Council Becomes Division of SRC by Unanimous Vote

On October 30 the Florida Council of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation held its annual meeting at Jacksonville. Bishop John D. Wing, Chairman of the Florida Council, presided at the meeting.

Guy B. Johnson, Executive Director of SRC, addressed the meeting on the work of SRC and the need for closer cooperation between the Council and the state interracial groups.

The Florida Council voted unanimously to become a state division of SRC. Details of the merger are to be worked out by the Executive Committee of the Florida Council in cooperation with SRC executives.

The group unanimously passed a resolution commending Governor Millard F. Caldwell and Attorney General J. Tom Watson for their firm stand in calling for a thorough investigation of the recent lynching at Madison, Florida.

All officers of the Florida Council were reelected pending reorganization. These are Bishop John D. Wing, Orlando, Chairman; Mrs. Israel L. Kaplan, Jacksonville, Vice-chairman; Dr. William H. Gray, Tallahassee, Second Vice-chairman; and Mrs. Henry Havens, Jacksonville, Secretary-Treasurer.

Atlanta Committee Elects Officers

Mr. W. L. Halberstadt was elected chairman of the Fulton-DeKalb (counties) Committee on Interracial Cooperation at the group's annual meeting in Atlanta last

White Primary vs. Democracy

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E. Rankin of Mississippi.

"This decision was a shock to me," said Senator Burnet R. Maybank of South Carolina. "Regardless of the Supreme Court decision and any laws that may be passed by Congress, we in South Carolina are going to do whatever we can to protect our white primaries."

"We've always handled that question . . . and always will," declared Governor Sam Jones of Louisiana.

"We'll certainly resist if possible any attempt to have Negroes vote in our primaries," said Tom Conely, chairman of the Florida Democratic committee.

"We'll find a way out of this," said George A. Butler, Texas State Democratic chairman.

"The Supreme Court nor no one else can control a Democratic primary in Mississippi," said Herbert Holmes, chairman of the State Democratic committee.

"As for the Negro voting in my primary," said State Rep. John D. Long of South Carolina, "we'll fight him at the precinct meeting, we'll fight him at the county convention, we'll fight him at the enrollment books, and, by God, we'll fight him at the polls if I have to bite the dust as did my ancestors!"

month. Dr. W. H. Borders was elected vice-chairman and Miss A. M. Hill, Secretary.

The Committee heard reports from Dr. Mark Thomas on "Practice of Negro Doctors in City Hospitals"; Mr. C. A. Scott on "Police Protection for the Negro Community"; Mr. Wallace Van Jackson on "The Public School and the Negro Child"; and Col. A. T. Walden on "Pending Suits on Equalization of Teachers' Salaries" and "The White Primary." Dr. Guy B. Johnson, Executive Director of Southern Regional Council, spoke on law enforcement.

Farm Ownership

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Borrowers in the rehabilitation program are also eligible for consideration for loans to purchase farms under terms of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act.

In the farm ownership program only a few farms can be purchased in certain counties each year because of the limitation of funds made available under the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act. County FSA Committees, composed of three well-known farmers, each year select the applicants who in the judgment of the committee are most likely to succeed. Since the Congress during the war years reduced to about one-half the annual loan authorization for the purchase of farms under the Bankhead-Jones Act, many families who were ready for farm ownership could not be given this opportunity. Therefore, some of them purchased their farms from outside sources. A large number who could not find farms simply carried on as renters.

In contrast to such verbal fireworks, from the politicians who more or less owe their positions to restricted suffrage, were the editorial comments from Southern states where the white primary no longer obtains.

Fairness Pays

"Negroes have been participating in Democratic primaries in this State right along," said the *Greensboro* (N. C.) *News*, "and nothing has occurred, despite this free voting, to upset either the racial or the political appellation hereabouts. Rather we believe that Tarheelia can boast of infinitely better race relations and a much higher quality of placeholders, on the average, than can its discriminating neighbors to the South. Fairness has a way of paying handsome dividends wherever it obtains."

"By a momentous decision upon the suffrage the Supreme Court has cut through various monumental pretenses—including its own—to establish more firmly the American republic," declared the *Nashville Tennessean*.

"Whether held at party or public expense, primaries are an essential part of the machinery for choosing public officials and they should be open to all eligible voters who care to enter," said the *Staunton* (Va.) *News-Leader*.

"That decision is one more milestone on

the way to fairness and justice for the Negro," observed the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. "If millions of citizens are to be deprived of any voice in choosing their own public officials then we may well ask ourselves just what the Four Freedoms for which we are fighting amount to."

The Liberal South Speaks

Even in the Deep South voices were lifted against the white primary. Among the first was a resolution adopted by the board of directors of the Southern Regional Council, which contained the following declaration:

"The Court has simply recognized the fact that primaries are effective instruments of government, and that the exclusion of the Negro voters from Democratic primaries in some of the Southern states is equivalent to denying them the right to vote on account of race. This decision has far-reaching consequences, and we appeal to the people of the South to make these consequences positive and constructive rather than negative and destructive. We deplore the statements of political leaders and others indicating a determination to disregard or nullify the decision of the Supreme Court, and we call on all fair-minded citizens of the South to respect the letter and the spirit of the Court's decision."

Another effective appeal for a truly democratic primary was made by Mrs. Glenn W. Rainey, a member of the Georgia Democratic executive committee, who in an open letter to the committee urged that it "take action that will make allies and not enemies of the responsible people of both races in the South." Declaring that "we have enough problems to solve without fighting each other," Mrs. Rainey said, "it is now clear that the Negro who is qualified to vote is going to vote; is it not just as clear that white Southerners who have regarded themselves as true friends of the Negro will make an intolerable blunder if, by denying his association with themselves in the Democratic Party, they drive him into the camp of their enemies?" Mrs. Rainey's letter was widely publicized, and the divergent reaction to it was indicative of the impending showdown between white supremacy and real democracy.

Democratic Challenge

There were not many editors in the Deep South who dared oppose the officialdom of white supremacy by endorsing the Court's decision. However, Judge Harry S. Strozier of the *Macon* (Ga.) *News* was a notable exception. In a fearless editorial he declared:

"Allowing the vote to Negroes of character and intelligence is not incompatible with the genius of American institutions. Denying it, solely on account of color, is inconsistent with the American ideal of fair treatment for all.

(To be continued next month)